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ABSTRACT

The study reported here was undertaken to determine if a structured human relations program, focusing on positive classroom management techniques, could contribute to more positive teacher-student relations and thereby help to decrease one of the major sources of friction in our educational communities. The major objective of this program was to focus on the task of developing more positive classroom management techniques for the participants. The design of the study specified six structured 2-hour sessions for each experimental group. Each session began with communication exercises stressing self-awareness and awareness of other school personnel. After the exercises, some typical classroom problems were presented through films, role play simulations, and other written materials. The participating subjects then proceeded to discuss and develop various positive coping techniques for dealing with the presented problems. The subjects were experienced teachers from three representative Title I, Elementary Secondary Education Act school in the Milwaukee Public School System. The general findings seem to suggest that teachers may have more success in dealing with elementary pupils than secondary students. Results suggest that this program may assist in dealing with relationship problems confronting urban schools. (Author/JM)

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A STRUCTURED HUMAN RELATIONS PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS

by

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During the past several years, there has been an alarming increase in the number of group conflicts in schools throughout the country. It seems that the critical issues motivating such conflicts revolve around situations which culminate in students, parents, teachers and community groups confronting each other in varying degrees of severity. With increased pressure for social, cultural, educational and economic changes in our society, there is the distinct possibility that such incidents will increase in frequency and severity. Basic to many of these conflicts, particularly those in the educational communities, are the problem of open communication and the lack of understanding between people of different cultural and social backgrounds; different age groups and different racial and ethnic groups. These problems appear to be quite prominently reflected in the basic human relationship and educational diad in the schools; that of the teacher-student. Most often the problems manifest themselves in the form of disruptive classroom conflicts. When such conflicts occur, teachers often attempt disciplinary techniques which frequently intensify the disruption as well as the negative atmosphere of the overall situation. Thus, it is at this point of attempting disciplinary measures that many of the relationship conflicts originate. So then, a lack of communication and understanding between teachers and students frequently lead to disciplinary confrontations which often evolve into wider and more serious conflicts involving larger numbers of individuals and groups.

Many people, including myself, feel that one way of dealing with such conflicts is by involving teachers and other school personnel in human relationship workshops.

This particular study was undertaken to determine if a structured human relations program, focusing on positive classroom management techniques, could contribute to more positive teacher-student relations and thereby help to decrease one of the major sources of friction in our educational communities. The major objective of this program was to focus on the task of developing more positive classroom management techniques for the participants.

DESIGN

The design of the study specified six structured two-hour sessions for each experimental group. Sessions were held once a week for six consecutive weeks. Each session began with communication excercises stressing self-awareness and awareness of other school personnel. After the excercises, some typical classroom problems were presented through films, role play simulations, and other written materials. The participating subjects then proceeded to discuss and develop various positive coping techniques for dealing with the presented problems. The particular problem areas focused on and presented in the six structured two-hour sessions were as follows:

1. Students who are rebellious. (Verbally abusive, refuse to follow school rules, etc.)
2. Students who have asocial values. (Gambling, smoking, dope, etc.)
3. Students and others who use alienating language. (Profanity, social or ethnic slurs, generalizations, stereotyping)
4. Students who physically abuse others for no apparent reason. (Fighting, intimidating)

5. Students who indulge in negative attention-seeking behaviors. (Acting out in class to get attention, exhibitionism)

6. Students who misbehave when left unsupervised for a short period of time.

It was proposed that the subjects participating in the study could develop more positive coping techniques for dealing with these problems and that the development of these techniques would be reflected in specific attitudinal and behavioral changes.

It was speculated that the experimental group subjects would have more positive attitudes toward students, as measured by the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory, and that they would be less inclined to employ such negative relationship indicators as discipline cards, psychological referrals and counseling referrals. Here I'd like to say a few words about these measures and why they were used. The Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory was used because it was designed to measure teacher attitudes and to project how well teachers might relate to students on an interpersonal level. This instrument, which was developed in 1951 has enjoyed wide use as a diagnostic research instrument with teachers and teacher trainees. Also, a count of pupil deportment records or discipline cards was tabulated for all experimental and control subjects. These cards are submitted whenever teachers cannot otherwise cope with students exhibiting negative behaviors. A numeral code is used to indicate the particular student offense as well as the teacher's recommendation and the administrative disposition of the case. Psychological and counseling referrals, too, are sometimes made when teachers are having relationship problems with students. Psychological

referrals are usually submitted in cases involving alleged extreme behavioral problems and/or negative interpersonal relationships. These are reflected by recurring cases of extremely disruptive behavior, strongly overt hostility and strong aggressive behavior against peers and authority figures, etc. In less intensive cases and situations involving alleged academic indiscretions; truancy, excessive tardiness, or failure to do homework, counseling referrals are usually made.

The Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory was administered to all subjects one week after completion of the workshops.

Referral data was collected for a four-week period prior to the training program and for four weeks after the program ended. Neither the experimental nor the control subjects were aware of the collection of this data.

SUBJECTS

The subjects were experienced teachers from three representative Title One schools in the Milwaukee Public School System. Title One schools are comprised of certain geographical areas with high concentration of children from low-income families. A large percentage of the students attending these schools are classified as educationally disadvantaged. In Milwaukee, three high schools, three junior high schools, and twenty-two elementary schools are so designated. One school from each level was used for the study. All schools represented are located in the central section of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area. The teachers were randomly selected from a population of teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. In each of the three schools, one group of

ten persons was selected to serve as the experimental group and another group of ten was selected to serve as the control subjects. Thus, a total of sixty subjects; thirty experimental and thirty control were selected to represent the three educational levels; elementary, junior high, and high school.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Basic assumptions of this study were:

1. That the group process itself would generate different and more positive coping techniques.
2. That teachers would be willing to share and discuss these techniques with their colleagues.

The group leader's function was to stimulate an effectuve exchange of dialogue, concepts, ideas and coping techniques amongst the participants. As problem-solving activities unfolded, the leader performed such tasks as raising additional questions for clarification, reinforcing constructive and creative comments, refocusing the group when necessary and encouraging participation by all group members. The group leader did not attempt to provide absolute answers for problems focused upon; primarily because there are none. Rather, he attempted to stimulate the type of group interaction which would allow potential solutions to eminate from the group itself. If there were absolute answers and methods for solving such problems, then it might be appropriate for the group leader to provide such. However, since there are none, it seemed more appropriate that the subjects be given the freedom and responsibility for developing their own solutions. In turn, the participants' opinions and ideas were evaluated; weighed by their peers.

So the group leader simply served to stimulate and facilitate teacher participation. It was assumed that this technique would provide a number of positive coping techniques and behaviors in teachers and, subsequently, it was expected that a decrease in number of negative teacher-student conflicts and confrontations would occur.

ANALYSIS

Analysis of the statistical results indicated that there were:

1. No significant differences in the scores of the experimental and control groups on the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory. However, the findings revealed that in each instance experimental groups had higher mean scores than did the control groups.

2. The findings also indicated that at the elementary school level the experimental group submitted significantly fewer discipline cards than the control group. However, the data indicated no significant differences in discipline cards submitted by the experimental and control groups at the junior high school levels.

3. In regard to psychological referrals, the data indicated that at the elementary and junior high school levels the experimental group submitted significantly fewer referrals than did the control groups. However, no significant differences appeared among the high school groups. The same was true for counseling referrals.

It appears, then, that the research treatment had most effect on the elementary school subjects where three of the four null hypotheses could be rejected. The junior high school subjects rejected two of the four null hypotheses, where none could be rejected for the high school subjects.

CONCLUSION

These general findings seem to suggest that teachers may have more success in dealing with elementary pupils than secondary students. There appears to be a pattern of increasing relationship difficulty, with the least amount of difficulty discernable at the elementary level; the junior high level appears to present more difficulty, and the greatest degree of difficulty is encountered at the high school level. Thus, it appears that as students become older relationship problems with teachers may become more difficult to resolve.

In conclusion, it appears to this investigator, that these general findings suggest that the structured human relations program herein described may have had some positive effect on the participating subjects. For this reason, it seems that this and similar programs may be of some value in our schools. One particular use could be to expose new teachers to such programs during their orientation period. Also, many other school personnel could have access to the program through in-service workshops, conferences, etc. It seems that such programs may offer one way of relieving some of the personal relationship problems in our educational communities.